

VZCZCXYZ0000
OO RUEHWEB

DE RUEHIL #0491/01 0651034
ZNR UUUUU ZZH
O 061034Z MAR 09
FM AMEMBASSY ISLAMABAD
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 1767
RUEKJCS/SECDEF WASHINGTON DC IMMEDIATE
RUCNDT/USMISSION USUN NEW YORK IMMEDIATE 9098
RUEHNO/USMISSION USNATO IMMEDIATE 4971
RUEHAAA/THE WHITE HOUSE WASHINGTON DC IMMEDIATE
RHEHNSC/NSC WASHDC IMMEDIATE
RHMFISS/HQ USCENTCOM MACDILL AFB FL//CCPA// IMMEDIATE
RHMFIUU/HQ PACAF HICKAM AFB HI//CCPA// IMMEDIATE
RUEKJCS/JOINT STAFF WASHINGTON DC IMMEDIATE
RHEFDIA/DIA WASHINGTON DC IMMEDIATE
RUEHLO/AMEMBASSY LONDON 9822
RUEHFR/AMEMBASSY PARIS 7054
RUEHMO/AMEMBASSY MOSCOW 1040
RHHMUNA/HQ USPACOM HONOLULU HI

UNCLAS ISLAMABAD 000491

SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: N/A
TAGS: [KMDR](#) [KPAO](#) [OIIP](#) [OPRC](#) [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [PK](#)
SUBJECT: PAKISTAN MEDIA REACTION: MARCH 06, 2009

Summary: Reports of the ongoing parleys between the PPP and the PML-N leaders through the mediators along with President Zardari's reported "willingness to end governor's rule" in the Punjab dominated headlines in all newspapers on Friday. Several major newspapers highlighted reports that "U.S. lawmakers unveiled legislation on ROZs (Reconstruction Opportunity Zones.)" All dailies front-paged reports that "militants blew up the mausoleum of a Pashto mystic poet" in Hazarkhwani area of the NWFP. Secretary of State Clinton's statement from Brussels that "Pakistan is facing a serious internal security threat" also received prominent coverage.

Most major dailies ran editorials on the current security situation prevailing in the country in the backdrop of the political standoff between the government and the PML-N. Commenting on the destruction of the shrine in the NWFP, the English daily, "The News," termed it "another indicator of the advancing wave of intolerance and extremism that now engulfs us..." Whereas, the prestigious daily, "Dawn," while criticizing the new agreement with Taliban, observed that "it virtually amounts to handing over charge of Swat to Taliban and allowing them to determine arbitrarily the distinction between vice and virtue and impose their own values through an extrajudicial system of vigilantes." On the contrary, the populist Urdu daily, "Khabrain," opined that the "government has shown courage in Swat by adopting the path of peace talks; the need now is to spread the scope of these talks." End Summary.

News Stories

"Zardari Sees No Way to Iftikhar's Return" "The News" (03/06)

"President Asif Ali Zardari has shown his willingness to end governor's rule in the Punjab and to let the majority party form government in the province. However, he has not yielded on the issue of the restoration of deposed chief justice Iftikhar Muhammad Chaudhry."

"U.S. Lawmakers Unveil Bill On ROZs" "The Nation" (03/06)

"With President Barack Obama's backing, U.S. lawmakers on Wednesday unveiled legislation aimed at using trade-spurred jobs growth as an antidote to Islamist extremism in Afghanistan and Pakistan. The bill would give goods from certain restive parts of those countries duty-free access to the U.S. market in a bid to promote legitimate economic activity where poverty fuels terrorist recruitment and the illegal drug trade."

"Time To Help Pakistan Is Now, Says U.S. Congressman" "Dawn"
(03/06)

"This summer the extremists may launch a new wave of violent attacks in FATA and other areas of Pakistan, warned Congressman Chris Van Hollen while advocating a combination of economic and military measures to combat terrorism.... The bill to establish the so-called Reconstruction Opportunity Zones enjoys unprecedented bipartisan support in both the House and the Senate. It is also backed by the White House, the State Department and the Pentagon."

"White House OKs Pakistan Aid Proposal" "Business Recorder" (03/06)

"The Obama administration is backing a proposal initiated under former President George W. Bush that would allow poor tribal regions in Pakistan and Afghanistan to sell their clothing and similar goods to U.S. buyers tax-free, said White House Advisor Paul Jones at a Capitol Hill news conference."

"Militants Blow Up Rehman Baba's Shrine" "The News" (03/06)

"Unidentified miscreants blew up the mausoleum of the most-revered mystic poet of the Pakhtun land Rehman Baba in the wee hours of Thursday by planting four bombs inside the structure of the shrine. The blast badly damaged the shrine of the 17th century Sufi poet."

"Pakistan Facing Serious Internal Threat: Hillary" "Daily Times"
(03/06)

"Calling the attack on the Sri Lankan cricket team in Lahore an 'eerie replica' of the Mumbai attacks, United States Secretary of State Hillary Clinton has said Pakistan is facing a serious internal security threat. Speaking at a meeting of NATO foreign ministers in Brussels, Clinton said a broad agreement had been reached on the basic elements of a strategic review on the way forward for Pakistan and Afghanistan."

"Clinton Seeks International Meeting On Afghanistan" "The News"
(03/06)

"U.S. Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton proposed on Thursday a high-level international conference on Afghanistan to be sponsored by the United Nations and attended by a wide range of countries including Pakistan and NATO allies.... "

"U.S. May Invite Iran To Afghan Conference" "Dawn" (03/06)

"In its first public overture to Tehran, the United States intends to invite Iran to an international conference on Afghanistan planned for this month, U.S. Secretary of State Hillary Clinton announced on Thursday."

"U.S. Praises Pakistani Police For Saving Sri Lankan Team" "Daily Times" (03/06)

"The United States on Thursday praised Pakistani policemen for saving the lives of the Sri Lankan cricketers, targeted by terrorists in Lahore on Tuesday, State Department spokesman Gordon Duguid said."

"Pakistan Bigger Problem Than Afghanistan: U.S. Envoy" "The News"
(03/06)

"The top U.S. diplomat in Kabul has warned that Pakistan poses a bigger security problem for the rest of the world than Afghanistan, in a newspaper interview published in London on Thursday. Christopher Dell spoke after the Tuesday's attack on the Sri Lankan cricket team and raised doubts about the government's ability to tackle militancy."

"Commanders Discuss Security, Political Situation" "Daily Times"
(03/06)

"The army top brass on Thursday discussed the political and law and order situation in the country, and regional security in a corps commanders' meeting at the General Headquarters (GHQ) in Rawalpindi. Chief of Army Staff (COAS) General Ashfaq Kayani chaired the

meeting."

"Investigators See LT Footprints In Lahore Attack" "Dawn" (03/06)

"Investigators are zeroing in on the footprints of the banned Lashkar-e-Taiba (LeT), according to preliminary investigations by the joint Investigation Team probing Tuesday's attack on Sri Lankan cricketers at Lahore's Liberty Chowk."

"LT Has No Links With 3/3 Attack, Says Malik" "The News" (03/06)

"Prime Minister's Advisor on Interior Rehman Malik on Thursday said that leads have suggested that the banned outfit Lashkar-e-Taiba (LT) and Lakhvi have no links with the attack on Sri Lankan cricket team in Lahore."

"3/3 Attackers Identified, Says Taseer" "The Nation" (03/06)

"Punjab Governor Salmaan Taseer told the media that the investigation had reached tangible conclusions. We have identified the people, who did the operation, and ambushed the Sri Lankan cricket team. We have a lot of information, arrested many people, and rounded up some suspects, but the final investigation will be presented to me on Friday."

"NATO Uneasy Over Alternate Routes" "The News" (03/06)

"NATO officials appear helpless and badly stuck with Pakistan as all their efforts to find alternate supply routes for their war goods were running into bureaucratic roadblocks mainly in Central Asian states. In background briefings to visiting Pakistani editors in Brussels and Mons, the NATO military hub, officials downplay the risks to their critical supplies while passing through the entire mainland of Pakistan."

"EU Help Sought To Overcome Root Causes Of Terrorism" "Dawn" (03/06)

"The Chairman of National Assembly's Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs Asfandiyar Wali Khan said on Thursday that terrorism posed a big threat to the world and was a major cause of instability in the region. He called upon the West, especially the European Union, to help Pakistan overcome the root causes of terrorism."

"Sufi Meets Fazlullah, Asks Taliban To Lay Down Arms" "Daily Times" (03/06)

"Tehreek Nifaz-e-Shariat-e-Muhammadi (TNSM) Chief Sufi Muhammad and Swat Taliban Chief Mullah Fazlullah met at an undisclosed location on Thursday to discuss the implementation of a Swat peace deal with the government, according to sources. The sources said that Sufi had firmly told Fazlullah to stop armed Taliban from patrolling Mingora and other parts of Swat and lay down weapons immediately."

"Demands Of Solecki's Kidnappers To Be Probed" "The News" (03/06)

"Hours before a deadline set by kidnappers to kill a U.S. hostage was due to expire on Thursday, the government announced that a top-level committee would investigate the captors' demands, the provincial government said in a statement on Thursday."

"One Killed, 19 Hurt In Dera Ismail Khan Mosque Attack" "The News" (03/06)

"One person was killed and 19 others sustained injuries when a hand-grenade hurled by unidentified miscreants at the worshippers exploded in Ameer Hamza mosque on Circular Road on Thursday."

"Crackdown On Political Workers From Tomorrow" "The Nation" (03/06)

"Police authorities would launch a massive crackdown against leaders and workers of anti-government political parties, including Pakistan Muslim League (Nawaz), Jamaat-e-Islami (JI) and Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI), from tomorrow (Saturday), official sources disclosed to 'The Nation' on Thursday. However, no decision has been taken yet for the arrests of the lawyers, one of the sources said."

"Dark Tides," an editorial in the centrist national English daily "The News" (cir. 55,000) (03/06)

"The destruction of the Shrine of Rahman Baba, the Pashtun mystic and poet who is widely regarded, indeed revered, across NWFP is yet another indicator of the advancing wave of intolerance and extremism that now engulfs us.... The deal done in Swat is a Pandora's Box of troubles that now pour out everywhere. The validation of one set of extremist demands now gives them the green light to make other demands wherever they choose in the entire country where they wish their writ to run. Let us be under no illusion here - the militants now ruling in NWFP have their sights set on ruling Pakistan. All of Pakistan."

"Betrayal Of Swat," an editorial in the Karachi-based center-left independent national English daily "Dawn" (cir. 55,000) (03/06)

"The new agreement makes further concessions to the Taliban.... The new understanding points to the problems that will be encountered in the implementation of the agreement. It virtually amounts to handing over charge of Swat to the Taliban and allowing them to determine arbitrarily the distinction between vice and virtue and impose their own values through an extrajudicial system of vigilantes. Is this the form the Nizam-i-Adl is to take? Is the state ready to abdicate its writ and allow the Taliban to take the law into their hands?

"Time For Major Decision-Making," an editorial in the Lahore-based populist center-right Urdu daily "Khabrain" (cir. 50,000) (03/06)

"[The present government] has continued past policies against terrorism. However, the government has shown courage in Swat by adopting the path of peace talks; the need now is to spread the scope of these talks to the tribal areas so that there is peace everywhere. Simultaneously, America must be asked to review its policies for a safe future of the region; and occupation forces must be withdrawn immediately from Afghanistan."

"Security Forces & TNSM Deal," an editorial in the Islamabad-based rightist English daily "Pakistan Observer" (cir. 5,000) (03/06)

"One can understand the motives of Western media and non-Pakistani commentators who present a negative picture of the deal because of the word 'Islamic Sharia.' There is a need to explain them that it is completely in line with our religion and provides quick and inexpensive justice to the people. Irrespective of the foreign pressure, Pakistan must take all the required steps to bring stability in the troubled areas and safeguard its vital interests."

"Taliban And The Sharia," an op-ed by Dr. Asghar Ali Engineer in the Karachi-based center-left independent national English daily "Dawn" (cir. 55,000) (03/06)

"The Pakistani government has agreed to allow the Swat authorities to enforce Sharia law in the valley and the Malakand district. This despite the fact that everyone knows how the Sharia law is understood by the Taliban.... The Taliban, who opposed education for girls, have after the Swat accord agreed to reopen their schools. Does this mean they politicized the Sharia?... It is for the Government of Pakistan to do justice to all its citizens. The Taliban or any other agency should not be allowed to enforce a medieval understanding of Islamic laws."

"Has The Indian Spoor Been Found?," an editorial in the Lahore-based liberal English language daily "Daily Times" (cir. 10,000) (03/06)

"The evidence is still not conclusive and one has to keep the mind open on who might end up being the culprit.... There is an unending stream of reported evidence that the Jihadi organizations of Punjab are all aligned with Al Qaeda and have been involved in acts of terrorism planned by it. Yet, all TV discussions avoid naming them, preferring to focus on 'foreign hands' that are never finally revealed."

"Terrorism On The March," an op-ed by Najmuddin A. Shaikh in the Lahore-based liberal English language daily "Daily Times" (cir. 10,000) (03/06)

"We can speculate all we want about foreign involvement and learned commentators can point to the fact that the Indians had warned the Sri Lankans against undertaking the sort of tour that the Indians themselves had cancelled, and that the Indians are seeking to retaliate for the Mumbai attack. Statements that verge on gloating have come from New Delhi and helped foster this sort of thinking. But if we want to face reality, we must accept that this was a homegrown attack. If it had foreign financing and perhaps some foreign planning, the finger should point not only towards our eastern border but also to the north of our own country. It is there that those who found shelter now find themselves under pressure, which can best be relieved if their sympathizers in Punjab - and there are plenty of those - can be motivated to create chaos and anarchy in the capital of the country's largest province."

"Terror War Comes To Lahore," an op-ed by Shafqat Mahmood in the centrist national English daily "The News" (cir. 55,000) (03/06)

"This is a time to keep the pressure on and show that acts of terror will not deter us from trying criminals who use our territory to wage war outside. We should also stop legitimizing them by placing their acts in a context of anti-Americanism. This is what some people are doing when analyzing events in FATA and Swat. The assumption is that if somehow the Americans would disappear from Afghanistan, all would be well. This is balderdash. American presence in Afghanistan has indeed created a sanctuary for some Afghan Taliban and Al Qaeda in the tribal areas but extremist elements in other parts of the country have an agenda of their own."

"Whose Service is This?," an editorial in the Karachi-based center-right sensationalist Urdu daily "Ummat" (cir. 33,000) (03/06)

"In a briefing to Pakistani journalists NATO commanders in Brussels have refused to give a timeframe for withdrawal of troops from Afghanistan. It shows that the U.S. and its allies have a long-term plan to stay in the region. Why cannot these designs be understood by the Pakistani political elite, who continue to quarrel with one another?"

GFeierstein